

# Coal, Parliament Hill's last feline and 'symbol of Canadian compassion,' dies at age 17

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Coal was a part of the cat colony on Parliament Hill, but when the colony closed in 2013 he went to live with public servant Danny Taurozzi.

SUPPLIED

Coal Taurozzi favoured a stylish blue tie on public outings, but that's not what made him a gentleman feline.

At the cat colony on [Parliament Hill](#) where, according to early reports, he'd been abandoned as a kitten, he was never seen with a bird or mouse in his

jaws, and he maintained a polite truce with the raccoons who made guest appearances at mealtime.

When the cat colony closed in 2013, and he accepted an invitation of permanent residence from public servant Danny Taurozzi, he graciously endured many unwarranted swats from his diva cat sister, Valerie, and eventually slept at her side, a protective arm across her body, when she became ill.

Later, he volunteered at a local [Ottawa](#) long-term care home, offering his always immaculate ebony fur to resident veterans for comforting caresses.



The beloved cat made an unsuccessful run for prime minister in 2015. SUPPLIED

Coal, the last living cat to have officially resided on the same grounds as the House of Commons, died peacefully on Tuesday, on a cozy sofa, with Mr. Taurozzi and his cat-brother Winston at his side. He was 17.

His passing was announced online by the country's top cat, Nico, who deigns to live with Prime Minister [Mark Carney](#) and his family.

Despite his humble beginnings, Coal made a unique yet unsurprisingly unsuccessful run for prime minister in 2015. With the help of Mr. Taurozzi, he campaigned, with posters and videos, on a humanitarian platform calling for more attention to animals.

Like the politicians he grew up with, Coal never met a camera he didn't love, said Mr. Taurozzi, who diligently enabled his vanity with a busy Facebook page. When a Japanese television crew filmed at the cat habitat, he featured prominently.

He also starred in a documentary about cats of the world. And he graciously preened for the many tourists snapping photographs at the colony. Wherever there was a camera, Mr. Taurozzi recalled this week, "there was Coal."

At the same time, Mr. Taurozzi said, "He wasn't a show-off. He was the reasonable cat. He did his thing, and didn't cause trouble."

Given his lack of interest in hunting, however, Coal did not uphold the original responsibilities of his Parliament Hill predecessors. Published accounts say the cats were deliberately located there to dispatch a rodent infestation in the basement of the newly built Centre Block in the 1920s – although another version of the origin story suggests a battalion of cats arrived a century earlier on orders from Colonel John By, to clear out the rats during the construction of the Rideau Canal.



Coal loved being photographed and would graciously preen for the tourists snapping pictures at the cat colony.

SUPPLIED



In the 1950s, exterminators made the feline terms of employment obsolete. The colony, which at peak population numbered about 30 and eventually included insulated wooden homes for the cats to take refuge from the cold, received care from groundskeepers, as well as unofficial security protection from the RCMP.

In the colony's last decades, a team of volunteers took over feedings and medical care. Mr. Taurozzi, who helped out several times a week in the last years of the colony, says he once encountered former prime minister Stephen Harper, a well-known cat lover, leaving his office on the Hill. Mr. Harper expressed his gratitude to the volunteers. Although members of Parliament routinely visited the cats, Mr. Taurozzi cannot confirm that Coal ever officially met a prime minister.

In 2013, renovations would have required the colony to be relocated. By then, the cats were older, and a spay and neuter program had dwindled their ranks.

With the colony closing, Mr. Taurozzi says, the half a dozen or so remaining cats were all adopted. Coal adapted happily to indoor life in Mr. Taurozzi's Ottawa home, where he liked to watch the birds in trees across the street from a hammock suctioned to the window.

He insisted, however, on hallway walks in his apartment building, and enjoyed being carried in Mr. Taurozzi's arms to Pet Valu and the bank. He and his siblings also travelled with Mr. Taurozzi on work trips to Toronto, where he occasionally hosted his owner's curious co-workers in his hotel room. And when cat or human became sick in the house, Mr. Taurozzi said, Coal kept them company.



Coal was was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer in March, 2024, and he received treatment that kept him pain-free, but his health took a turn on Canada Day.SUPPLIED

His [Facebook page](#) eventually grew to 5,000 followers, mostly fellow Canadians, but also fans from as far away as Iraq.

Toward the end of his life, Coal developed kidney issues and arthritis, but insurance and donations, and caring veterinarians, ensured he received gold-standard care, Mr. Taurozzi said. “He was generous with people, and people were generous with him.”

When he was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer in March, 2024, he received treatment that kept him pain-free. But his health took a turn on Canada Day, his honorary birthday, and no more could be done.

He received what a grieving Mr. Taurozzi delicately called a veterinarian-assisted death on July 8.

“He was a symbol of Canadian compassion,” Mr. Taurozzi says, “a gentle presence that touched the hearts of countless people. He will be deeply missed, but never forgotten.”

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